



# Ileana Sánchez

## PUERTO RICO BRAILLE ART BOOKS



Visually-impaired people were able to “read” for the first time in 1824, when a French teenager named Louis Braille devised a system of raised dots on paper to enable soldiers to communicate in the dark (it was originally called “night writing”). Little had changed with this basic system until a Puerto Rican graphics designer named Ileana Sánchez came along.



In 2000, a process known as “Techno Braille” was introduced in which a transparent epoxy was used on a sheet of paper instead of raised dots. It was more durable and easier to mass produce. A Techno Braille press can print 16,000 pages per hour, in contrast to the 1,000 pages per hour a Braille raised dot press can print.

A native of Santurce, Puerto Rico, Ileana Sánchez was a graphics designer who had just learned about Techno Braille when she attended a lecture by Rebecca McGinnis, director of Access Programs for the Blind at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. Sánchez began to explore ways to use the new technology to bring art to the visually impaired, especially children.

In 2001, Sánchez won a \$50,000 grant from the Sappi Fine Paper’s, “Ideas That Matter” fund. She collaborated with McGinnis and the Met’s Access Programs for the Blind to produce a book of famous artwork from the Metropolitan Museum for blind children using Techno Braille.

The finished product - “*Art and the Alphabet: A Tactile Experience*” - was a groundbreaking work. Written in the manner of a traditional alphabet book, each letter of the alphabet is accompanied by a raised Techno Braille image of a famous painting. Each image is in color, so the siblings of a blind child can learn from it, too. Sanchez used her entire \$50,000 grant to hire two printing firms in Humacao, Puerto Rico, to produce a limited run of 1,000 copies, which have been donated to museums around the world. Sánchez studied design at the Pratt Institute in New York and is now based in Gaunabo, Puerto Rico.

In Illinois, 220,300 residents are considered legally blind.

Graphic rendering from image of Ileana Sanchez found on Art Beyond Sight : NYC Conference; [www.artbeyondsight.org](http://www.artbeyondsight.org)